

# INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE REVIEW



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the # hash sign

explain the origin of the # hash sign

The origin of the hash sign, also known as the pound sign or octothorpe, is somewhat obscure, but its usage has evolved over time.

1. **Etymology:** The word "octothorpe" itself has a disputed origin, with various theories proposed. One commonly cited theory suggests that it originates from Bell Labs in the 1960s, where telephone engineers allegedly named the symbol after the athlete Jim Thorpe, along with the "octo-" prefix referring to its eight points. However, this theory lacks strong evidence.
2. **Typographical Symbol:** Historically, the hash sign was primarily used in typography and cartography as a symbol for "number" or "pound weight." In the UK, it is often referred to as the "pound sign" due to its usage to represent the British currency unit before the advent of the symbol "£." For example, "5#." meant "5 pounds."
3. **Telephony:** In the 1960s and 1970s, the hash sign found a new purpose in telephony as a signaling character. It was used on touch-tone keypads to indicate a break or termination in a sequence of numbers, often referred to as the "pound" key. It was also used in Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and other keypads for similar purposes.
4. **Computing:** With the rise of computing and the advent of ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), the hash sign was assigned the code 35 (or 0x23 in hexadecimal). In computing, it is commonly used to denote comments in programming languages like C, C++, Python, and many others. It also has various other uses in computing contexts, such as denoting hashtags in social media, separating fragments in URLs (anchors), and representing special values in data structures like hash tables.

Overall, the hash sign has had a diverse range of uses throughout history, evolving from its typographical origins to become a ubiquitous symbol in telephony, computing, and modern digital communication. Its exact origin remains somewhat uncertain, with multiple theories proposed to explain its etymology and adoption in various contexts.



explain these theories

Sure, let's delve into the theories surrounding the origin of the term "octothorpe":

1. **"Octo-" Prefix:** The "octo-" prefix refers to the eight points or ends of the symbol. This part of the name is straightforward, as the symbol indeed has eight points.
2. **Thorpe:** The "Thorpe" part of the name is less clear. There are several theories proposed:
  - a. **Jim Thorpe Theory:** One popular theory suggests that the symbol was named after Jim Thorpe, an American athlete who won Olympic gold medals in the 1912 pentathlon and decathlon. According to this theory, workers at Bell Labs, where the symbol was allegedly named, admired Thorpe's athleticism and decided to name the symbol after him. However, there is limited evidence to support this theory, and it remains somewhat speculative.
  - b. **Thorpe as a Common Surname:** Another theory proposes that "Thorpe" was simply a common surname, and the symbol was named after an unknown person with that surname. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this theory either.
3. **Bell Labs Origin:** The origin of the term "octothorpe" is often associated with Bell Labs in the 1960s or 1970s. According to this theory, engineers at Bell Labs needed a name for the symbol when it was added to telephone keypads, and they chose "octothorpe" as a whimsical or humorous term. However, the exact circumstances surrounding the naming remain unclear.
4. **Other Theories:** There are numerous other theories and anecdotes surrounding the origin of the term "octothorpe," but many of them lack substantial evidence or are based on hearsay.

In summary, while the "octo-" prefix is clear in reference to the eight points of the symbol, the origin of the "Thorpe" part of the name is more uncertain. Theories range from naming it after Jim Thorpe or a person with the surname Thorpe to simply being a whimsical term coined by engineers at Bell Labs. The exact origin of the term remains somewhat mysterious and subject to speculation.